

Sūrah 68

Al-Qalam

(The Pen)

(Makkan Period)

Title

This *Sūrah* has two titles – *Nūn* and *al-Qalam*. Both these words appear in the opening verse of the *Sūrah*.

Period of Revelation

It is one of those *Sūrahs* which were sent down in the early Makkan phase. However, it emerges from its contents that it must have been revealed at the time when the disbelievers' hostility towards the Prophet (peace be upon him) had increased intensively.

Subject Matter and Themes

Three themes are taken up in this *Sūrah*: (i) a response to the opponents' allegation; (ii) warning and advice to the opponents; and (iii) exhortation to the Prophet (peace be upon him) to practise perseverance and constancy.

At the outset, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is told that the disbelievers accuse him of being a mad person. However, the Book presented by him and his sublime morals and manners suffice to refute their allegation. Soon everyone will see who is wise and who is insane. He should not therefore feel the pressure of the storm of opposition directed against him. It is part of the disbelievers' strategy to force him into compromise.

Without naming, a prominent enemy of Islam who was a familiar figure in Makkah is presented in order to open everyone's eyes. At the same time, the Makkans were well aware of the Prophet's excellent conduct. His exemplary character and morals were in contrast with those possessed by the Makkan chiefs who were to the fore in opposing him.

Verses 17–33 present the parable of the orchard owners who were ungrateful to Allah, though they were blessed by His bounties. They did not listen to the advice of the best person amongst them. Eventually they lost the bounty granted to them. They realised the truth only after they had lost all that they had. This analogy warns the Makkans that the Prophet's advent in their midst constitutes a trial for them as it was for the owners of the orchard. If they refuse to follow the Prophet (peace be upon him) they will undergo punishment in this world and a more tormenting punishment is in store for them in the Hereafter.

Verses 34–47 constitute an extensive warning against the disbelievers. At places they are addressed directly, and at others indirectly, as the message is directed to the Prophet (peace be upon him). Only such will prosper in the Hereafter who, marked by the fear of God, lead their lives in this world. It is an irrational proposition that the obedient ones and culprits be recompensed alike by God. The disbelievers are totally deluded in assuming that God will recompense them as they think. They do not have any authority to support their whims. They refuse to surrender themselves to God. As a result, they will not be able to prostrate before God, even if they wish so on the Day of Judgement. They will meet a disgraceful end. They cannot escape God's punishment in that they are guilty of denying the Qur'ān. The respite granted to them has misled them. As they are not immediately punished for the rejection of truth, they mistakenly think that they are on

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the right path. However, they are on the way of self-destruction, even without realising it. They do not have any valid or sound ground for opposing the Prophet (peace be upon him), for he is a selfless preacher. He does not seek any reward from mortals. The disbelievers do not have any specific knowledge for rejecting his claim to Messengership or for dismissing his teachings as false.

In conclusion, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is directed to bear with all the hardships in the cause of preaching faith until God decides the matter. He should avoid the impatience betrayed by the Prophet Jonah (peace be upon him), which led to his ordeal.